The Twitter Manual

The What, Why and How of Twitter

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Introduction

Social media has become a drastic shift in the way things work on the Internet. Many dismiss it as a waste of time. Many see it as something young children do and not worth the time of the serious adult.

But, those who dismiss social media are, I believe, destined to fall into the waste-bin of Internet history. Social media represents a re-engineering of the top-down approach to the flow of information online. Now, anybody can become an opinion leader in any market using social media alone. Individual people can now command more attention that major brands, all from the confines of their mobile phone while sitting in a coffee shop.

What follows includes information repurposed from David Risley dot com [www.davidrisley.com], plus some new material. The goal of this ebook is to simply be helpful and to act as kind of user manual to those who don't know where to start when it comes to using social media. For those who are already "in the know", you might learn something as well.

All materials contained within this ebook are written by David Risley.

Spread The Word

If you like this ebook, all I ask is that you spread the word. Do these two things for me:

1. Be sure to follow me on Twitter (@davidrisley) www.twitter.com/davidrisley
2. Be sure to retweet this manual to your twitter followers using the URL www.freetwittermanual.com

Twitter: Why?

The Internet is broken up into, let's say, two groups of people: (1) Early adopters who try everything that comes out and are on the cutting edge, and (2) everybody else. And there is a whole lot more of "everybody else" than there are people like myself (early adopters). The "everybody else" crowd hears buzzwords like Twitter but chalks it up to one of those things that's just too advanced to understand. And there is also the issue of people just getting comfortable with certain things and not being intellectually curious enough to try something new. These are the kinds of people who are still using Internet Explorer despite everybody saying how much better the alternatives are.

Twitter is one that definitely breaks down cross this digital divide. You have those who get it and use it often. You have those who tried it and decide it is stupid. And you have those who just don't get it.

Not long ago, I sent out an email to the PCMech [www.pcmech.com] mailing list. In that email, I laid out the benefits of Twitter and, of course, asked people to follow me on Twitter. Why? Because I can then have a back channel for communication with my readers. It is good for me to have my finger on the pulse of my readers and not have everything go through PCMech. Said simply, this site isn't the proper place for everything.

So, I had a lot of people follow me. But, as I observed some of these new people getting their feet wet with Twitter, it was very clear they really didn't understand how to use it or what to do with it. So, I wanted to provide a simple how-to manual.

So, let's touch on the salient points.

Why Use Twitter At All?

Twitter is worth using because it allows you to tap into the power of others instantaneously. Want to share a thought with others? You can. Want a quick answer to a question? You can get one on Twitter. Want to find out what the latest buzz is before others do? Twitter.

It is easy to throw Twitter into that category of nerdy, Myspac-y things some nerds do. It is easy to see it as a waste of time. My response would be to not be so fast at dismissing it. As a person who follows technology, the worse thing you can do is dismiss things by thinking you already know what it's all about. That is an easy sentence to falling behind the curve.

So, given that we have a lot of "normal" people reading PCMech, I thought I would list some reasons why a normal person might want to consider using Twitter.

1. **You can use it to create interesting contacts and spark interesting conversations**. And, yes, Twitter is used for conversation all the time. It is not a one-way flow and if you think it is, it is because you are not using it correctly.
2. **You can build your network**. Why would you want to do that? Because, in the future (and now, for that matter), your network is going to be your security. Imagine losing your job right now. If you have a large network of contacts, don't you think you're going to have a much higher likelihood of crossing paths with somebody who might be hiring?
3. **You can tap into knowledge**. You might like the anonymity of just Googling for what you need to know. And, yes, much of the time that is the best way. But, real people are the best resource. The power of many minds often beats out the power of one. When you follow the right people on Twitter, you can learn information you

wouldn't have learned otherwise. Not only that, by following that person you now have a way to directly contact that person - over Twitter.

4. **Real-time information**. Twitter is perhaps one of the most "right now" social media sites on the Internet. It is commonplace to find out about news on Twitter way before you'd see it elsewhere. Not only that, you can ask your Twitter network a question and many times get answers back within a few minutes.
5. **Expand your horizons**. Keep in mind, our computers are supposed to be TOOLS to help you improve your life. You didn't buy a computer so that you could experience the joy of repairing it, did you? Likely not. If your computer doesn't help you connect to people and do things, what good is it?

In my position as a tech blogger, I consider it one of my jobs to enlighten others on the opportunities the world of technology presents. I know that many of my readers are not entirely in tune with what is happening out there. And, honestly, the forward movement in the general world of technology is happening OUTSIDE our computers. Yes, Twitter is a social media site. Yes, Twitter can be used as a time waster and can suck attention. But, it is also a resource and a good one. I would never have started using it if it was a waste of my time.

If you should sign up for Twitter, realize that you will only get out of it what you put into it. If you don't regularly submit anything and don't follow anybody, Twitter is going to seem incredibly stupid. You have to participate in it and then, trust me, it becomes a LOT more interesting.

How Do You Make Twitter Worth Using?

One of the important things to understand about any social medium is that you get what you give. You have to be willing to share your thoughts and you have to be willing to participate in the community. You can't expect to

find much use in Twitter if you just join and then sit back and wait. And you're not going to find much value in Twitter if you only use it to promote your own site.

Twitter is a community. You build up your network by getting others to follow you. When you "follow" a user on Twitter, this means that anything they enter into Twitter will show up on the timeline on Twitter for you to view. You are only going to see the "tweets" of the people you follow (unless you are viewing the public timeline which is everybody). The more people you follow on Twitter, the more information you will be able to observe.

The flip side of this is getting others to follow you. When others follow you on Twitter, this opens up the opportunity to have conversations on Twitter and be able to talk back.

How To Have a Conversation on Twitter

When you simply enter a "tweet" and submit it, that tweet simply goes onto your timeline. It can be read on the public timeline of Twitter by a casual visitor, but the people most likely to see it are those who follow you. So, when you submit a tweet, anybody who follows you can see it. It does not mean they WILL see it. Understand that Twitter can also be a noisy platform. If somebody following you also follows a bunch of other people, your tweet may be missed by that person.

To send a tweet which addresses a specific person, you make what is called a "reply". You do this by using the "@" sign and then the person's Twitter username. For example, if anybody entered a tweet with "@davidrisley" in it, it would come up as a reply to me. Most people put that at the beginning of their tweet, but you can also include a person's Twitter username anywhere in your tweet. The key, though, is to prefix the username with the "@" sign.

You can send direct messages over Twitter as well. This is just like instant messaging in that nobody else can see a direct message. To send a direct message over Twitter, you use the format “d [username] [message]. So, for example, to send me a direct message saying “Hi”, you would enter a tweet like “d davidrisley Hi!”. Notice that you do not need to use an “@” sign when sending a direct message.

By using a combination of public messages, public replies and direct messages, you can turn Twitter into a powerful conversation medium.

What Do I Tweet?

This is a common question from Twitter newbies. You feel as if you have nothing important to say, so you sit there staring at Twitter at a loss for words. Or you end up tweeting things like what you had for lunch, a route which usually ends with the mistaken conclusion that Twitter is a huge waste of time.

In reality, the famous question of Twitter “What Are You Doing?” is actually misleading. You can type anything you want - not just what you’re doing. Perhaps you want to share a link to a cool webpage you found. You can ask questions (which gets more fun as you get more followers). You can retweet other people’s stuff. You can tweet your observations or thoughts on anything.

Most importantly, you can begin interacting with others by way of replies. Once you begin true two-way interaction with others on Twitter, you’ll get the feel for the value of the medium quickly. So, instead of staring at

Twitter.com wondering what to type, instead take some time to find and follow others. Then, begin by replying to other people.

Think of Twitter like a big party. People are sitting around having conversations. You walk up and begin participating in the conversation that are already taking place. Makes sense, right?

What so many people tend to do is just start tweeting little things. If we take our party anology, that would be like sitting in the middle of a room where the party is happening and just blankly talking out into space. Not only are people not listening, but they're likely to give you weird looks if they even notice!

So, remember. Twitter is a big party. It is the conversation at the water cooler. Treat it as such and you'll get the feel for it much faster.

10 Tips For Getting New Twitter Followers

Twitter will prove not very fun unless you get some people following you. There is no secret to getting followers. It comes down to what I stated before: You get what you put into it.

Some ways to get followers:

1. **Leverage Your Network**. If you already have a blog or a large network on a site like Facebook, leverage that resource to get your existing audience to follow you on Twitter.

2. **Be Active**. Nothing sucks worse than a dead Twitter profile. So, be consistent and try to tweet a few times per day.
3. **Be a Person**. It's fine to use Twitterfeed [www.twitterfeed.com] to pipe your new blog posts into Twitter, but you need to be a regular person, too. A Twitter stream is supposed to be more than another RSS feed.
4. **Tweet value**. Put stuff out there that is actually worth reading. This doesn't mean you can't post random things you're doing throughout the day (you want to be human), but people will value you more if what you say is actually interesting.
5. **Follow others**. If you follow other people, chances are they'll follow you back. Don't be random about. Find people who are actually worth following for your particular interests.
6. **Strike a conversation**. Just following a person and sitting back accomplishes little if your goal is for them to follow you back. Strike a conversation with them! Talk back! Send a reply. That's a sure-fire way to stand out to people who follow a lot of people.
7. **Retweet**. If somebody you follow sends out a really useful or interesting tweet, retweet it to your own followers. Not only do you provide value to your own followers, but it shows up as a reply to the person who originally sent the message. Good on both fronts.
8. **Be Interesting**. It helps, not only to be a real person, but to actually be interesting. Funny tweets are one example. Careful, though, don't be fake!
9. **Be Interested**. Take an interest in your followers. This goes hand-in-hand with several of the above tips, but at the end of the day, when you show interest in your network and the actual people who follow you, they'll WANT to follow you. Acknowledge your followers publicly when they post something interesting, for example.
10. **Don't Forget Photos**. People like photos, so if you use TwitPic [www.twitpic.com] sometimes to tweet photos, people will watch and take a gander.

It Isn’t All About Being Followed

I’ve had people see that I follow almost 3000 people and they ask, “Why"?”. They observe, and correctly so, that I couldn’t possibly read the tweets of 3000 people. And they’re right. I do NOT read every tweet that comes across my plate. There are other Twitter users who follow a lot more people than I do and, trust me, they’re not reading everything either.

When you follow a person, that means you can tap into their thought stream. Random thoughts, new links they find, or their new blog posts – you’ll have those things entering your tweet stream. So, I have almost 3000 people who comprise a steady stream of collective thought.

The beauty of a site like Twitter is the near-instantaneous nature of it. You can learn of new things quickly. News events break VERY fast on Twitter. It is like having 3000 pairs of eyeballs out there acting like a little conduit of information which is sent TO YOU – via Twitter.

Do you see the value of that? I sure do!

Following the right people puts them into your thought stream. You can see what they see (if they tweet it, of course). That’s a LOT of information at your fingertips. And like any river or stream, you just dip your toe in it when you see fit. I’m not watching every tweet that comes across my screen. But, I monitor it in my peripheral vision (so to speak) so I can keep tabs on what’s happening out there.

The value of your tweet stream is determined by WHO you follow. So, take whatever you’re interested in, find the people in your niche, and follow them. You can use a site like Twellow [www.twellow.com] to find people. You

can even use Twitter search [http://search.twitter.com] to enter search terms you're interested in, observe the people who talk about those things, and follow them.

We all like to be followed on Twitter, but let's not get too hung up on it. Obviously being followed is a good thing. But, I think there is perhaps more value to be had in simply following the right people.

Top 10 Signs You're Not Worth Following on Twitter

These are the top things I look for to tell me you're not worth following:

1. **You tweet spam**. This would include the usual stuff such as "make money" MLM stuff, tweeth whitening, how to get more followers, etc.
2. **You don't have an avatar**. That brown default avatar is, for me, classic sign of a spammer. If you're not a spammer and you're still using the default avatar, change it now because you're in bad company.
3. **Your avatar is sexy**. You know, I'm a guy and I like a beautiful woman as much as any other guy. But, I don't want to subscribe to it on Twitter. If your avatar is you simply advertising how much you want to get laid, then get lost from my Twitter account.
4. **Your profile bio is stupid and offers no reason why I should follow you**. A profile like "I like fun things" tells me nothing.
5. **Your profile has nothing but links**, with no personal interaction with your followers. If you're just a one-way stream, you're not using Twitter correctly and I won't follow you.
6. **You just tweet news or quotes**. Sorry, I can get my news from anywhere and I don't want AP headlines tweeted to me. And if all you do is tweet other people's quotes, then you're just telling me you let other people think for you, too. You offer no value. Buh-bye.

7. **All you do is talk about stupid stuff like what you had for lunch**. I like personal (non-business tweets), but at least be somewhat interesting and don't make that the only thing your profile broadcasts.
8. **You tweet in another language**. Nothing personal here, I know not everybody speaks English. But, it wouldn't make much sense for me to follow somebody I can't understand.
9. **Excessive Blip.FM links**. I don't CARE what music you listen to, and for me to click it and listen to a song is the biggest waste of time EVER.
10. **Tweets with a lot of weird characters**. Some people like to tweet endless amounts of people full of heart symbols and and other "wing dings". No.

So, what do you think? Do you have other reasons for not following people? What do you look for when you decide whether or not to follow or not?

Getting the Most Out of Twitter

So, Twitter is what it is. However, there are a lot of really cool third-party sites out there that take advantage of Twitter to provide add-on capabilities.

Twitter Search (search.twitter.com)
This is the search engine for Twitter. Technically, it isn't a separate site. But, I find that so many people don't use it and they should. For example, if you are interested in blogging, you can search for the word "blogging" and you'll find people talking about it in real-time.

If you are in charge of the reputation of a company or brand, the value to this should be obvious. You can find out what your customers are talking about - RIGHT NOW. Are they talking about you? Just continually monitor Twitter Search for the name of your company or brand. The moment somebody says something relevant, you can chime in to help. It makes brands personal and it is awesome customer support.

TweetBeep (www.tweetbeep.com)
Get email alerts whenever somebody tweets about something you're interested in. It is actually allot like Google Alerts, except for Twitter. Want to be notified if anybody mentions your name, your city or your website on Twitter? Set up a TweetBeep.

TwitScoop (www.twitscoop.com)
TwitScoop creates a realtime, live-changing tag cloud of what is hot on Twitter right now. At a glance, you can see what the leading subjects of conversation are on Twitter. Very interesting to watch whenever there is some big news event taking place. You can often find out about it before you'll ever hear about it on television.

Twittervision (www.twittervision.com)
A take off the word "television", Twittervision is definitely a site you can load into your browser, sit back and watch. It is a mashup of Google Maps and Twitter, showing you tweets as they happen and from where they are located on the globe. It is interesting to watch the map move around in real-time and seeing what people are saying around the world right now.

Twellow (www.twellow.com)

Twellow is a directory of Twitter users and it allows you to search for people based on their name and the information they put into their bios. Very useful for finding people of similar interests to you to follow on Twitter.

#Hashtags (www.hashtags.org)
A real-time tracker of hashtags on Twitter. A hashtag is like a tag for tweets, a word describing the content or nature of the tweet. Hashtags are an invention of the Twitter community, not really something enabled by Twitter itself.

TwitterPoster (www.twitterposter.com)
A look at TwitterPoster might remind you of the old days of those million pixel homepages. What it is is a graphical representation of the most influential Twitter-ers. The larger the image, the more influential the person right now. Might be a bit useless, but it is cool.

TwitterFeed (www.twitterfeed.com)
If you run a blog or anything else which has an RSS feed, you can use TwitterFeed to automatically fetch the latest entries from that feed and send them as tweets using your Twitter account. A lot of bloggers, for example, use this to automatically send out links to new posts over Twitter.

Rules of the Road

There are a few things that are worth keeping in mind:

1. Twitter is now breaking the barriers of early adopters and is beginning to go mainstream. As they do so, the service is being overwhelmed. Twitter downtime happens so often that is is an ongoing joke. So, do not be surprised when you see Twitter seem to die off every now and then. It usually comes back in a few seconds.
2. I most certainly do NOT recommend using any Twitter bots to auto-follow anybody or mass follow groups of people. All this does is open you wide up to Twitter spam. I suggest you exercise just a little judgement in who you follow. Yes, it is more work, but it means you'll get more value from it. If you get too much input (by following just anybody with no judgement), Twitter will quickly become nothing but a noise machine that just sucks your attention.

If you are not on Twitter, I suggest you give it a go.

In Closing

Some have gone so far as to call Twitter a utility, much like the phone company. Will it become that ingrained into our daily life? Perhaps. There is one thing that I would bet the bank on: microblogging is here to stay and will only become more mainstream as time goes on.
- *David Risley*

Now, I leave you on a humorous note...

Top 10 Signs You're Addicted to Twitter

1. You're on the Twitter website and find yourself refreshing the page rather than waiting for the auto-refresh. F5 is worn out.
2. You realize you need to turn off Twitter to get any work done. Problem is, you "realized" that an hour ago, too.
3. You get overly excited when you get a new follower.
4. You find yourself typing "@" to reply to people, even if its in an email.
5. You are bored and confused whenever there is another Twitter outage.
6. You have a Twitter client set to start automatically on boot up.
7. Your blog hasn't been updated in awhile, but you've been Twittering like crazy.
8. You feel the strong need to check up on Twitter before going to bed at night. Or perhaps on your laptop IN bed.
9. First thing you do when you get home from date night with the wife is check Twitter.
10. You put your Twitter handle on your business card.